



# PRISM

WILLIAM PEACE UNIVERSITY  
LITERARY MAGAZINE







Peace Fountain

*Kassie Burton*



## Prism Staff

Curaré Cross

James Embree

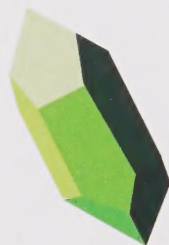
Mikayla Johnson-Davis

Mary Kubeny

Larimer Lexine

Michael Marsh

Brynn Morgan



## Managing Editors

Taylor “Kassie” Burton

Lydia Granholm

Evangeline Lubak

Shelby Lombardo

## Graphic Designer

Evangeline Lubak

## Faculty Advisor

Kate Maddalena



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## *Poems*

To be the Dalai Lama of Thailand.....4

Routine.....5

Transfusion.....6

Songs of Spring.....8

Who You Are.....8

Polo Blue.....9

Never a Frown, With the Golden  
Brown.....10

The Umber Venus.....11

As like as not the wind perchance  
may blow.....11

The Puppet Master.....12

## *Visual Art*

Peace Fountain.....1

Puppet Master.....13

Untitled (1).....14

Untitled (2).....15

Sunset at Peace.....33

## *Short Stories*

Black Lives Matter...Don't they.....16

Roger Martin's Last Ballad.....16

The Fourth Rule.....18

North Carolina and Me.....21

Solace.....22

Sophie's Dog.....24

All Cockeyed & Narrow.....27

The Salamander.....30



## To be the Dalai Lama of Thailand

*Ely Murray*

To be the Dalai Lama of Thailand,  
a child of age two must properly identify two of  
the belongings of the previous  
Dalai Lama.  
You see, this is based on the belief of reincarnation;  
The new Dalai Lama must have the wisdom of the  
former,  
In order to lead his people.  
I'm told this is my first life;  
I have no idea what I'm doing.  
I'm told I'm a baby inside,  
'Eyes that have seen too much, but lips that cannot  
speak it',  
So says,  
The woman who read me.  
The woman who read me also says I'm stunted.  
The woman who read me says my soul is some-  
thing innocent,  
Something raw, something skittish, something  
unprepared for this world,  
And I am. But  
In every soul,  
Regardless of whether it's your first time here  
Or your seventeenth,  
I believe there is something eternal,  
A base knowledge given to you by your ancestors,

your earth,  
and your god,  
for that reason alone,  
I know empathy.  
I know I feel just as much for a Somalian child in  
poverty  
as I felt for my own family growing up,  
but I have never been to Somalia.  
I know I'm not a man who fought in the Seven  
Years War,  
But I know panic.  
I wasn't alive during the Civil Rights Movement,  
But I know anger, rage,  
I know fear like the Plague.  
And I know I wasn't a buddhist monk,  
but I know bliss and tranquility,  
I'm aware I wasn't a 50's housewife,  
but I swear I know the difference between happy  
and "happy".  
This isn't my first rodeo, I promise  
and because of that I feel determination  
Like I remember first hand the Alamo  
and I know resolve like Joan of Arc  
and I know persecution like Salem,  
I was never a woman married to a man during a  
war,  
but God knows I know what it's like to lose some-  
one,  
and yes, this might be my first life,



but the human experience doesn't know what  
death and life is,  
and for that reason alone,  
I am confident,  
for that reason alone,  
I know hope,  
and for that reason alone,  
I know it'll be okay.

## Routine

Sadie Stoneheart

with my head against the mattress,  
my knees towards the middle of the bed,  
toes curling over the edge  
I stare at the clock that is trying to tell me the time

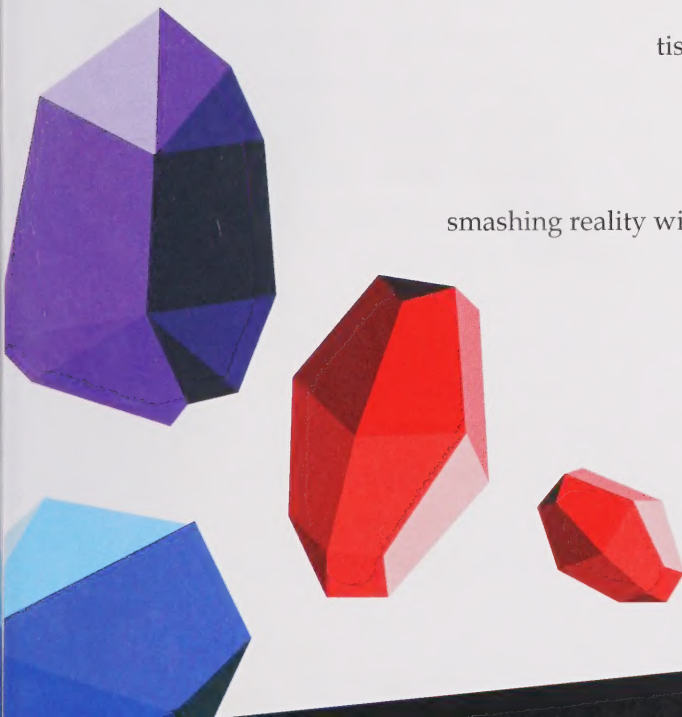
blurred  
the numbers squish together  
turning ones and threes and sevens  
into a fuzzy yellow-orange blob  
because decaying has manipulated my eyes into seeing a softer reality

the quieter it gets,  
the more noises I hear  
tissue paper fluttering on the floor urges me to turn the light on  
as it tricks me into thinking there's danger in my room

replays of the day flashing through my head  
smashing reality with the imagined stories that zoom across the computer screen  
coding my brain to think of what if's and how to's

it's dark again

I could've sworn I heard someone breathe  
...or was that me?



## Transfusion

*Rachael Thomas*

Him

He goes to work  
Eight-hour shifts  
Seeing face after face  
People he doesn't know  
People he won't see again  
Or at least ever recognize  
At the end of the day, he goes home  
To an empty home  
No wife  
No children  
No family  
Or even a friend

His skies are always cloudy  
The air always misty  
Nobody notices him  
Walking by on the street  
He appears gray  
All color drained  
Alone

Her

She goes to class  
Only a few hours a day

Among classmates she doesn't know

None of them have ever noticed

Or perhaps care

Homework and studying

Her only "companions"

She goes back to the apartment

That her parents pay for

Only a few months

Until she has to start paying for it

It's barren

No boyfriend

No family

Or a friend

Not even a roommate

It always rains for her

Wet and freezing

But no one sees

Or smells the salt

She appears ashen

The color melted away

Alone

But fate was funny

When it came to these two

They both smiled

It was strange

Something that didn't happen often



They both laughed  
A sound that seemed nonexistent  
Inside they felt something  
It was warm  
And it would beat  
It was quiet  
But it was there

But fate is funny  
Terrible things can happen  
Happen to innocent people  
Him and Her were guiltless  
But they still suffered  
It was just so sudden  
Too quick and inevitable

They were rushed away after it all  
Laying under the lights in a white room  
People trying to keep them alive  
But they were too bloodied and bruised  
Both inside and out  
The doctors scurried around them both  
But in all the chaos,  
They both turned to look at one another  
Gazing into each other's eyes  
Knowing that soon they would close  
Death standing between them

He reached out to his baby

Wanting to touch her one last time  
To feel her fingers around his  
To never let go  
She reached out to her love  
To let him know she was there  
To hold his hand again  
To never let go

The moment their fingers intertwined  
They felt it  
Since meeting, they had started to change  
Life was no longer dry  
No longer cold  
No longer lonely  
Color had returned  
Happiness was felt  
Despair was no longer a tormenter  
But a defeated enemy

They had given each other everything  
He had given himself to her  
She had given herself to him  
Their hearts beat in sync  
A rhythm that would always play  
And for once they felt love  
The transfusion was complete

Death pricked them both

Claiming them  
They faded together  
But their hands didn't let go  
Their love still alive  
Forever alive

## Songs of Spring

*Michael Marsh*

As bumbling bees bob and weave,  
Bubbly birds begin babbling,  
Butterflies float by on flimsy wings,  
Waltzing to songs of a sultry spring.  
As bursting irises and snowdrops bloom,  
The whole of life begins anew,  
A splendid sea of green sweeps through,  
Filling all things with its lively blushing hue.  
As flowers must grow, to bloom and die,  
Winter must fall for spring to get by,  
So it must go with all new life,  
From white to green, from green to white.

## Who You Are

*Ré Cross*

Maybe I just couldn't see.  
Perhaps my glasses had too heavy of a rose tint.

I tried too hard to fix you. I admit, I expected a lot  
from you. I expected you to be a better person than  
your character would allow.

I attempted to turn you into a more applicable indi-  
vidual. You know, easier to swallow? I mean, that  
is what you said you wanted to be. But that wasn't  
something you were willing to work for.

I spent so long wishing the world would want you.  
I mean, I did. Why did no one else? Why weren't  
you enough?

Then I realized: you were enough. You were more  
than enough. You were too much. You didn't care.  
So why would they?

I did my best. You did not do yours.

You are incapable of being helped; I could not help  
you.

However, you are not incapable of being loved;  
you are just incapable of loving in return.



## Polo Blue

*Davis Felts*

Some say a photographic memory is a gift from  
God,  
Others, a curse from the devil.  
But I have faith God has good intentions,  
And even Satan couldn't be that cruel.  
See in my memories when you crawl on top of me,  
The two of them join forces.  
There's a devil and an angel at your shoulders,  
And they aren't whispering in your ear...  
No,  
I swear my whole neighborhood must've been  
deaf,  
Because their yelling still wakes me up at night  
Even the sounds of their hands smacking your skin  
should have been enough to wake those in  
the next room.  
But they weren't strong enough to stop you,  
They were never strong enough.  
No,  
Eventually they fade away  
And it's just us.  
It is just me and your sweat  
That pours from your chin to my spine  
And burns like grease dripped from a pan.  
It's just me and your moans  
As they breathe their way into my ears

So heavily that they still weigh on me.  
It's just me and my bed  
My couch  
My floor  
My shower  
My yard  
My nightmares...  
Oh, It's just me and your smell.  
Polo blue that you submerge yourself in,  
So far that even the faintest smell of it drowns me.  
It's just me and your memory,  
That causes me to stumble  
Any time I walk through the cologne section  
Now it is just me and my son.  
I couldn't give him advice before his first date,  
Because he smelt too much like you.  
So if a photographic memory is a blessing from  
God  
Then I choose hell,  
And if it's a curse from satan,  
Then I hope smells like polo blue,  
  
That you sweat and you moan and beg like I did.  
I swear to God if hell smells like polo blue, I hope it  
is because you are there.

## Never a Frown, With the Golden Brown

*Davis Felts*

I stare at the the brown liquid at the end of the spoon,

Like it was my first cup of hot chocolate getting ready to warm my soul after a snow day.

I look forward to it,

Like it was the first time I would kiss a girl.

Hands shaking, stomach in knots and hidden away afraid to let anyone see me.

I miss it

Everyday I'm without it my heart hurts like the first it was broken.

I love it,

Like a pet because no matter how bad my day was as soon as I got him she would greet me grinning ear to ear.

I smile down at it,

Like it was a kid tugging at my pants leg eager to hear my voice.

I need it

Like the fields need the rain to grow.

I need it

Like a son needs his father's push on his first time without training wheels.

I need it

Like the tides need the moon to flow.

I need it

Like Clark Kent needs Lois Lane

I need it

To fly because a cape and tights aren't fitting right and my world needs saving...

I worship it

Like the doors of my church have been locked and the preacher's tongue cut out.

I light it up

Like I'm afraid of the dark because when the lights go off the monsters move about.

I inhale it

Like it's an oxygen tank full of hope as I go deeper and deeper into the sea.

I inject it

Like it's chemo because it might kill me but so might this cancerous life.

I put it down.

Like I never want to see it again... but never fully out of eyesight.

I pick it up.

I pick it up and let people down

Like I'm balancing two different loved ones on a see-saw.

Like my 16 year old cousin who has idolized me since he no longer had idle eyes

Who will spend the next six years of his life trying



to tell me to put it down in his dreams and prayers  
religiously.  
Until he picks it up.

## The Umber Venus

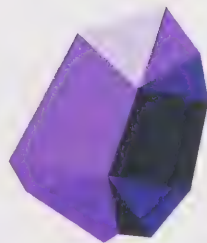
*Michael Marsh*

Her voice is gold being rolled off of silk,  
Silver shrouded in sable and ermine,  
The wind's sweet refrain instead of the chimes.  
Her hair is the thread that floats between clouds,  
Vagabond puffs of a dreamlike cotton,  
Stronger than the bond that's formed between us,  
Spun well, by hand, for The Umber Venus.  
Her voice is fields of indigo on fire,  
Sirens passing through a cool city night,  
Nights that balance euphoria with fright.  
Her face is a queen's in regalia,  
Crowned and crossed by the sun's own radiance,  
All it shines down on is all hers to take,  
I'm hers to conquer, I'll be what she makes.

## As like as not the wind perchance may blow

*Michael Marsh*

As like as not the wind perchance may blow,  
For it may just as like choose to withhold  
Fickle zephyrs that warm chill earth in time,  
And stay or go as they like, without fence.  
Just as well, the sun shines even on crime  
As it would fain shine as bright on innocence.  
Such is your brilliance, it falls on all –  
All fall under it, all in love are kin.  
Doth not the streams flow in spite of all sin?  
A brook or creek may flood despite season,  
The snow melts, the seas churn and flow in a  
Loving dance; nymphs gaze on in envy of us,  
Falsely thinking that they know what they sense,  
When they could never know, for such are we.



## The Puppet Master

*Rachael Thomas*

He is here  
He is always near  
Never leaving you alone  
As his power over you has grown  
He smiles at you with crooked teeth  
Not even trying to hide what lies beneath  
His voice is so strange and hypnotic  
The words he speaks are deep and demonic  
And his eyes are the worst  
So dark and filled with thirst  
Who is he, with all these features  
He is no man, but a creature  
He is the Puppet Master  
And he will only bring disaster  
Material items are not what he aspires  
It is only power over others he desires  
To take control and play a game  
Your body, mind, and soul are his to claim  
He ties his strings onto your limbs  
Preparing your actions to turn quite grim  
Your skin bleeds, the bonds so tight  
All you will feel is a sense of fright  
He makes you dance, sing, and play  
Oh, how you wish you could get away  
And when you begin to cry and plead  
He only laughs, revealing his greed

The Puppet Master then pulls you close  
Admiring you, his power's host  
"Don't be afraid," he begins to taunt  
"All you must do it what I want"  
"Be my servant, my fun, my toy"  
"With you in my grasp, I am filled with joy"  
He holds you in his deceitful arms  
As if he will keep you safe from harm  
He whispers for you to hush your weeping  
As if he expects you to start sleeping  
And no matter how hard you try to break free  
His control and force have cut you deeply  
You give into his commands, while his strings  
become mesh  
The web wrapping around your pale and cold flesh  
The life you lived has been drained  
Giving him the strength to now have reign  
Here you will remain, tied in wires and lies  
For the Puppet Master has won his prize





Puppet Master  
*Rachael Thomas*



Untitled (1)  
*Michelle Presutti*





Untitled (2)  
*Lydia Granholm*

## Black Lives Matter... Don't They

*Ré Cross*

I am honestly so tired. I am scared, angry, and sad. My tears have been replaced by rage long ago. Videos of our people being murdered have become so frequent that I've come to expect it. I am just another nigger to these white people. They don't give a damn about my life. I am not a person. I have no family, friends, goals, dreams, talents, skills, etc. I am a thing. An object. Something to be thrown around and used. Something to be destroyed. No matter what orders I do or do not follow, I am one bullet away from being a hashtag. If it even takes a bullet. Perhaps they're feeling handsy that day. I am not afraid of being hit by cars. I am not afraid of being kidnapped. I am not even afraid of being raped. I am afraid of being "protected". I am afraid of the people who are supposed to keep me safe. How long until I am not afraid anymore? How long until I am a person again? How long until I matter?

## Roger Martin's Last Ballad

*James Embree*

The stamping of the raindrops was a symphony, one which Roger Martin's rocking chair partook as he held the cigar up to his mouth and clicked the lighter a couple times. It was somewhere after the second click when he first really noticed the yellow light, made more apparent by the dark clouds. The light allowed him to peer inside and observe his woman quietly lounging on the couch. He let out a sigh as he figured he'd allow himself this pleasant-ry later, and would go in to embrace her awhile.

But first, he'd watch through the window and ponder her, ponder who she was then and now. She was silently watching the news, but Roger Martin looked further through, through the lenses of his Monica's glasses to see the dissociation of a certain light. She knew she was watching television, maybe even the news, but she could not tell her husband the anchor's name, even though it was the same Rob Hopper that had read them the local crimes and weather every night for much of the preceding years.

The memories of Monica Martin's mind were a comb of sand slowly being swallowed by high tides of Alzheimer's and Roger Martin sat on his porch swing and tapped the cigar against his temple, wondering if his own sense of self was on a similar clock. This curiosity was only a distraction from what racked his brain.

As he gazed into the grayness of the rain he could properly envision the drops subsiding and making way for the slender figure of Rosalind Meyer,

complete with the black curls that wrapped around her neck when she laid down. Despite having read the final words on her life and a tearful salute to her memory only hours ago, Roger basked in her youthful glow a final time before allowing the rain to take over once more in his line of sight.

The fields in which Roger and Monica Martin resided had become a blank canvas for the weather to portray whatever it deemed worthy. Months earlier, it had encapsulated a serene silence, having the Martins wake up to a rising pile of snow upon its soil. Now it formulated a harsh and unforgiving wasteland of mud and puddles being stacked upon by the clapping thunder. In a wave of nostalgia, Roger saw once again the high strands of corn he'd grown, and himself running callused hands through the pillars of his product as he scaled the side of his farm.

But as the gentle folds and cracks of skin stretched through him, and as his stomach grew portlier and his hands softened, it was only bare earth that stood the test of time. All other prospects withered and decayed, as he'd expect to one day do himself. But this was not what frustrated him, compared to what he saw now, in the rain and the mist.

He thought of his bed, the small imprints left over the years by himself, and the two women he'd taken to there over the years. He recalled the nervous rhythms of his and Rosalind's heartbeats as he kissed her, waiting for the screen door's song to announce his wife's arrival. Roger felt a clump gather in his throat as he saw this. He swallowed it; all the while trying to reimagine the diminishing swell of his wife's belly — recreating that disappointment, the snips, the disdain, the ever-growing distance

between the two of them on that couch.

He held back a river and shrugged it off as he had many times before and drank at the cool air in a long, satisfying breath.

Parts of the landscape glistened and shined from what was left of the sun, reminding Roger further of the earring Rosalind had left behind on that one occasion. He knew they had never spoken of it, but he always knew that Monica saw it. He walked into their room and saw her looking right at the jewel, sitting on the nightstand, as she gathered laundry. She simply looked away, walking thereafter with a general knowingness that Roger would now trade his hands for.

His mind hiked to the boy they didn't have, or the girl. He saw no trucks or vans pull up with small children to visit them, a notion he understood broke Monica, but one that he also understood to be out of their control. Monica never was interested in trying again, a notion Roger felt compelled to respect. But it was in remembering this that he felt the aura of whisky on his breath and a warmth in his belly. He smelled the dives and Rosalind's perfume. He almost felt himself growl at the raindrops spraying before him.

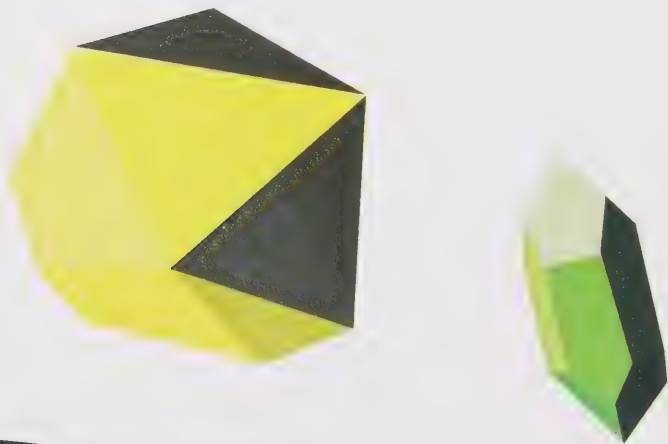
But as Roger looked back into the house and at the disillusioned woman watching Rob Hopper, he felt forgiveness. He revisited the consolation she provided at his mother's demise, even though it wasn't a feeling she could relate to. He had felt her silence during the final days of her father, her sole touch being her hand on his as they silently watched the sunset beyond their fields. She was fifty-five, too old to blindly forgive a dying man.



The coldest act of a warm woman, he thought. Best not to talk about it.

It was none of this, but the memories of their own thriving twenties that sent a catharsis through him. Their elopement was only days old, fresh in his mind. The late-night film screenings and quiet glances over old books. The daytime drinking and love-making, hiking trips and getaways without a single polaroid. He'd cupped the woman's face in his hand with a wide-eyed and childlike wonder, gaping in sheer awe. There were moments and scenes colored not only by affection and gratitude, but by anger and resentment, all in which capitalized who they were. In seeing this, Roger Martin felt an epiphanic plunge of not love, but understanding, an understanding that was not to be swept up.

Roger Martin finally stood up, creaking the floorboards and slipping the cigar into his pocket. He walked into the house, with small steps of regret, but intentions resolute.



## The Fourth Rule

*Shelby Lombardo*

The Nell children, being usually left alone to their own devices, only had three rules that they needed to strictly adhere to – three rules that their mother often repeated to them at differing stages of the day, depending on the urgency or need for admonishment. The rules were as straightforward as they were varying in severity: 1) Be home in time for supper 2) Do not talk about your father and 3) Never, under any circumstances, play near the river.

The first rule was the one that Jack, Lisa, and Carole Nell most often breached, for they were only young children – Jack being the oldest at age nine, six-year old Carole in the middle, and Lisa the baby at age four – and the family was too poor to afford a spare wristwatch. The punishment for arriving home past supper ordinarily resulted in a tongue-lashing from their mother, or else a more severe kind of lashing if their father found out.

The children were not sure how frequently, or if ever, they had broken the second rule, for it was so vague. Jack, as the oldest, and thus believing himself the most knowledgeable, was fairly certain that a general conversation about his father's work was not what his mother worried about the neighbors hearing; therefore, the children had never been punished for breaking the second rule.

Nor had they been punished for breaking the third rule, because they truly did not venture near the river, which lay a mile away from their home. Though the other children in the area tried to persuade the Nells into joining them – there were

many opportunities to play as soldiers in the thickly covered brush or scavenge for pretty stones at the edge of the water – they were resolutely against breaking rule number three, since it was the one their mother most habitually repeated to them.

However, one early morning in July, Jack, Carole, and Lisa found themselves debating breaking the third rule, due to the heat. Their normal place of play – the wide, grassy field that bordered their house, was without the comforts that were found near the river – full groves of trees and the rush of cool water. Both Jack and Carole had vetoed the idea of playing inside the house, because their father was asleep on the sofa, and neither wanted to risk waking him. Lisa was still too young, or too naïve, to feel the presence of danger – the most cheerful of the three, she still ran to hug her father without caution while Jack and Carole would hang behind, waiting to see his response. Jack reasoned that they would stay away from the water, and simply play amongst the trees, while Carole noted it was unlikely their mother would ever find out, as she was hardly ever out of the house.

“Just this once, seeing as it’s so goddamned hot out!” Jack had avowed, Carole’s hazel eyes flashing at his language. Before Carole could scold him, or else threaten to tell on him, he had gripped Lisa’s small hand and the pair had taken off in a sprint, with Lisa squealing in delight.

Upon arriving, two ideas occurred to Jack. First, there were a lot of other children here, perhaps nearly twenty, and second, the actual river did not seem to be nearly as wild as his mother had described. Yes, it was wide – wide enough that he could not see to the bottom at its center – but the water appeared calm, and best of all, it was cool and

refreshing against their skin. He wondered, not for the first time, if his mother hadn’t exaggerated the dangers. Looking at the number of other children around, he thought that perhaps the third rule had been created to safeguard against breaking the second rule.

Within moments of arriving, Jack found himself with a group of boys, playing soldier as they hid in the rough bushes nestled against the bank, occasionally charging out onto the grainy, dirt-covered shore with war cries and tree branches in hand. Carole, who was secretly still afraid of the water, joined a small group of girls sitting away from the river, in an area that was considered neutral territory, where they knitted flower crowns and daisy chains from the meager offerings available to them. Lisa occupied herself with the shiny rocks that glistened through the water, occasionally bringing a particularly smooth or sparkly one to Carole for approval.

Jack, though embattled in a great war between the Germans and the Americans, was careful to keep an eye on his sisters. His mother often reminded him of Lisa’s young age or Carole’s temper, which Jack understood as the fourth, unspoken rule: 4) Watch out for your sisters. Wars, however, are quite distracting, and after a while, Jack no longer glanced over to check on Lisa or Carole. Instead, he crossed branches with the “German” soldiers, stomped through the water, and spread his arms out to swoop down on the enemies in his fighter jet.

Carole had also ceased to check on Lisa. The first few times she had presented Carole with a pebble, it had been cute. After seeing ten or eleven similarly plain, grey rocks, Carole had sharply shooed Lisa away, suggesting she build a giant castle with her collection. Thankfully, Lisa had relished the idea,

and set out to complete her task.

That didn't immediately explain why, when Jack remembered the unspoken fourth rule, he realized his baby sister was standing up to her shoulders in the water. Except she wasn't exactly standing anymore, instead, she was sort of bobbing, her blonde braids briefly disappearing beneath the surface as her arms flailed frantically. Jack couldn't scream, but he darted through the water, abandoning his weapons of war in the dirt. Carole, upon realizing the danger, shrieked,

"LISA, LISA, LISA!" over and over and over.

Tall for his age, the water only reached Jack's waist when he got to Lisa, and he found the bottom of his feet sinking firmly into the mud. He easily picked up his sister and carried her back to shore, where Carole stood white-faced and pacing. Apart from her soaked, shabby blue dress and trembling lips, Lisa looked alright. Jack was finally able to choke out a few words,

"Lisa! Why were you that far in the water?" He set his sister down in a patch of sunlight, so that she might dry off. Lisa sniffled, fixing her eyes on Carole, then suddenly balling up her fists and wailing,

"Carole said I should build a castle! But she told me I had to go away to build it, so I was gonna build my castle on the other side so Carole couldn't see it!" Jack turned to Carole, waving his hands in her still-pale face.

"Carole! Why do you always gotta be mean to her? Can't you go a day without-" He stopped, seeing the guilty look on Carole's face, and remembering

that it was he who was supposed to be watching the both of them.

"Well, never mind it. We can just stay here 'til Lisa is dry." Carole quickly brought over bunches of flowers so she could show Lisa how to tie them together, and the three children sat in a cluster in the sun. Jack even let the girls decorate his arms and head with the crowns, ignoring the giggles and teasing from the other boys who still played soldier near the river, though they were not quite as close to the water as they had been before. Once Lisa was dry and her braids fixed by Carole, they walked back to their home.

They found their mother in the kitchen, shaking pepper into a large pot of chili. The sleeves of her yellow dress were far too long for a day this hot, but Jack knew that she was simply trying to abide by the second rule.

"Oh good, you're back-" Their mother stopped suddenly, her eyes narrowing at the hem of Lisa's dress. Jack looked, and was horrified to see speckles of mud clinging to the bottom. He looked back at his mother, whose face was tight, and he knew they were about to get a tongue-lashing. The sound of heavy steps drew his gaze away from her and to the doorway, where his father stood on slightly unsteady feet. The scent of caramel filled the room, which Jack knew came from the dark amber liquid his father poured into a short glass and drank throughout the day.

Jack glanced back at his mother, and saw that she now was watching his father, twirling the spoon in her hand and biting her lip. His father was looking at Lisa's dress and Lisa was gaping back up at him, her bottom lip twitching, when it happened. He took a



lumbering step forward, his hand outstretched wide toward Lisa's cheek. Jack jumped forward without thinking, and their mother cried out. The hand faltered, and thus the third rule went unpunished.

## North Carolina and Me

*Ré Cross*

I often feel like I'm watching myself live my life, sort of like a movie. I question my motives and actions and try to analyze myself as one would do to a character in a film. There are moments where I am at one with my body and I genuinely live, and I crave for more of those experiences. I felt that way today, in this moment. I always complain about Southern weather and the weird customs people have down here (people tend to be standoffish and personable all at once.), but one thing I never really experienced until I got here was silence. Where the only thing you can hear are birds chirping and the wind blowing. While I do miss the constant Reggaeton beats at all hours of the day and night along with the camaraderie and spirit of my hometown, North Carolina has given me the blank space I need to come into who I am and experience complete wholeness within myself.



## Solace

*Alex Brooks*

I stood upon the old boat watching the sun set over the seaweed green ocean, hands in my pockets and feet over the ship's bow. A slight breeze glanced the back of my head as i stared right into the horizon. Though it was cold, I wore only a tee shirt and pants, i actually rather enjoyed the cold compared to the summer heat. I was so enthralled with my thoughts, i didn't notice someone sit down to my left. A bit startled i jerked my body to see them only to calm down when i saw who it was.

"Hey," he said.

"Why are you here," I scowled at him in annoyance. I never enjoyed the company of others and now was not an exception.

"Checking up on you," he said as he folded his arms in his lap, looking relaxed and rather bored.

"I don't need to be inspected," I grumbled while facing the ocean and watching the sunset.

He only peered at me with his eyes and stared in the same direction.

"Well, I don't really care enough to do it on my own. Everyone else just convinced me to do it," he shrugged his left shoulder in admittance. "Not like you and I are good friends, right?"

I didn't reply only staring further at the sea's horizon. He took my silence as a message to continue.

"Frankly, the only reason I really came was to make sure you were gonna do what you need to. I don't care enough about you to be all sympathetic, i also just don't care about you period. Not like I hate you but, meh, nothing there."

His reply was...honest. I couldn't argue the validity of his opinion nor that I didn't feel the same. I turned to him hoping it would make speech less awkward.

"What exactly am I meant to do?" I stared at him expectantly like he was a Rosetta stone for my midlife crisis. His answer was a stab to my foot.

"Hell if I know. Something," he reached into his coat pocket and found some gum. "Probably something that you'll like? Get hitched? Have some kids, own a company, write a book? Take your pick kid 'cause



it's a long list."

He emphasized "long" by drawing out the 'O' sound, not to mention I could smell the mint on his breath. I hate mint.

"You're not presenting a clear solution," I rumbled. He rolled his shoulders and smacked his lips.

"Hey that's life kid, no easy answer and no simple matter. It's all a bunch of string tangled into a ball that you gotta, like, fix."

I looked towards him, then back to the sea. A smart idiot, that's what he was. I often cursed his incessant ability to calmly spout out words of confidence without sounding boastful or overdramatic. I knew he could persuade even the most cutlass and drunken of retches to divulge their secrets or pay out of their pockets. A silver tongue encrusted with ruby, an apt comparison for a guy like him.

But I also knew he had no malicious thoughts. His heart wasn't in it and his mind was dulled. He knew that i understood his situation and merely brought his own opinion for sale. There was no loss in this situation but instead only possibilities.

I continued to stare at the sea, but with less intensity and instead with an unperturbed countenance.

"Your motivational techniques need improvement," I grimaced. He only smirked back at me and snorted through his nose, almost like a chuckle.

"Least your humors back. I was getting tired of mopey and dopey over here."

Heh. That was kind of funny. Well I guess conversation is my kryptonite for depression. He

seemed to be reveling in himself that i apparently looked better.

"Your jokes are still subpar."

"Ouch. I'm wounded, really. I don't think i'll ever be able to joke again with that kind of positive reinforcement," he teased me while poking my arm with his elbow.

That actually got a chuckle from me. Eventually we both turned back to the sea and watched the horizon, the sun almost set and the sea turned into Poseidon's dark underwater kingdom. I turned to him slowly.

"Do you really believe that after everything we've done, that we can really and truly live?"

He turned to me, halfcocked smirk.

"That's what we're doing bro. This is living."

So, we sat there, upon a wrecked ship on the shore of a lonely island. Ourselves and no one else as the sun hid behind the ocean curtains and the gentle embrace of the cool night overtook the both of us.



## Sophie's Dog

*Evie Lubak*

Sophie wanted a dog more than anything. Ever since she could talk, she had asked for a dog. All her friends had dogs, and Sophie most certainly did not want to be left out.

Sophie wanted a big dog, one big enough to ride to school! She wanted a dog that would curl up with her and keep her warm at night, a guardian from the monsters in her closet. She wanted a dog that would fetch sticks and frisbees and the cookie jar her mommy kept on the top of the fridge. Sophie wanted a dog that would play with her when her parents were busy, that would keep her company when her friends went away.

Sophie had one problem: her parents wouldn't let her get a dog. They said they didn't have the money or the space in their one floor, four room home to support Sophie's dream pet. They said Sophie wasn't old enough for such a responsibility. She was a big girl, she reasoned, six years old now! But, every time she begged for a dog, her parents' answer was always no.

But Sophie was a stubborn little girl, and she would never give up on her dream. She used her allowance to buy a collar and leash, a food and water dish, and chew toys so that the moment her parents caved in, she would be ready with everything she needed to care for a dog. Although her parents' will over not getting a dog ultimately trumped Sophie's will to get a dog, she used her supplies to care for an imaginary dog...secretly hoping her parents took notice of how responsible

she was and change their minds over owning a dog. Sophie wished on every star, birthday candle, and penny thrown into a fountain for a dog. No matter what, Sophie never lost faith.

One day, Sophie was walking home from school when she heard something rustling in the bushes. The trail from her house to school was a short and well-traveled one, through an open field with dense forest on either side. Sophie ignored the sound at first, busily humming a song as she kicked tiny pebbles across the path with her pink sneakered feet. She stopped when the rustling through the trees sounded again, this time accompanied by the sound of an animal. Sophie peered into the trees, but could see nothing from where she stood. She cast a glance down the trail, the one her parents always told her not to stray from, before turning back to the forest. What if it's a lost dog? Sophie thought excitedly. Her desire to listen to her parents' instructions only held out for about five seconds against her desire to find a pet, no matter where it came from. Shifting the straps of her backpack on her shoulders, Sophie traversed into the forest.

It was a good deal darker in the forest beneath the canopy of trees, but the sun still shone through, providing warmth and light to all the little plants and animals within. Sophie kept her eyes peeled and ears sharp for whatever creature had made the noise, pushing aside low tree branches and stumbling over large roots. Then a throaty howl echoed through the undergrowth. By all accounts, the little girl should have been frightened by the sound, but so excited was she about potentially finding the companion she had dreamed about that she instead quickened her steps in the direction of the sound.

Sophie took no notice of the torn apart ferns or deep claw marks in the dirt as she explored deeper. When she heard the animal again, it sounded extremely close. She scaled over a rotting log covered in fuzzy green moss before sliding down the side... and tumbling into something large and warm. The obstacle shifted at the sudden contact, backing away and stretching out. Sophie gazed up in wonder as a pair of green eyes much like a cat's stared back at her.

Sophie nearly squealed with joy as the thought flitted through her young mind as she took in the sight of the animal: the universe had at last answered her prayers and sent her a dog!

Well...it was an odd looking dog she had to admit. The animal did indeed have four legs and a tail like a dog as well as a long body and neck. It had a charcoal black coat that shimmered slightly in the sparse sunlight, with fluffy tufts along its head, neck, shoulders, and tail. It had pointed white teeth like a dog...or an alligator. It had four paws like a dog, though its claws looked much bigger and sharper than any other mutt Sophie had met before. The creature had a long pink tongue that flickered in and out of its jaws like a canine's did when it was panting. Sure, Sophie had never seen anything remotely like this dog before, but her mom had told her how there were hundreds of breeds of dogs that all looked very different. This pooch was probably just a very exotic breed.

At least it was a big dog, as she always wished for, easily two feet taller than Sophie while lying down. The little girl took a step towards the odd canine, holding one small hand out to pet it. The dog gave

a low growl as its intelligent green eyes narrowed and it showed its teeth. Sophie pulled back, startled, before remembering what her daddy had told her about how lost dogs sometimes got scared when they were far from home. She shrugged off her backpack before pulling out her lunchbox and opening it up. She had half a peanut butter sandwich and a bag of chips left over. She tore the sandwich in half before holding it out to the dog, flat on her palm like when she had fed a goat once at the zoo. The animal sniffed at the food with interest, experimentally nibbling at it, before swallowing the quarter sandwich in one bite. Sophie giggled as it licked the crumbs off her hand before poking her in the chest with its snout in search of more food, nearly knocking her over.

"You're hungry, aren't you boy?" she cooed as she offered the dog the other half of her sandwich which it happily snapped up. She opened the bag of chips, preparing to reach in and grab one to offer the hungry beast, when it suddenly snatched the whole bag in its teeth, chewing up the chips and plastic before swallowing and licking its lips. "Hey, you didn't share! Bad dog!" Sophie cried, but her huge grin betrayed that she was amused instead of angry. The dog gave a low satisfied growl before shuffling closer to investigate her open backpack. Sophie reached out and stroked the animal's shiny coat. While the longer tufts felt stiff and coarse like fur, the rest of the beast's coat was smooth and reminded her of large fish scales.

The dog snorted as it pulled its head out of Sophie's backpack with a large fabric ring stuck on one of the ridges on its nose. Sophie laughed before reaching up and dislodging the pet collar. The tags on the collar read, "Rex," which was the name she

had given her imaginary dog when she first bought the collar. She grinned up at the dog, her new dog, before undoing the clasp on the collar and putting it around the canine's neck, only just able to clasp it again once she slid the collar to its widest girth.

"C'mon, Rex! Let's go home!" Sophie pulled out a leash from her backpack and clipped it to Rex's collar. The dog watched her curiously, sniffing at its new accessory, before standing up to follow. Sophie let out an dazzled gasp as Rex towered over her, almost yanking the ten foot leash out of her small hand when it stretched its neck out to its full height. Sophie shrugged on her backpack before climbing onto the mossy log, giggling when Rex gently grabbed her backpack with its teeth to lift her over the fallen tree instead.

Sophie's parents were very worried when their little girl didn't arrive home from school when she normally did. However, when her sweet voice called out to them from the driveway twenty minutes later, they both breathed a sigh of relief before heading out to meet their daughter. "Sweetie, did you get lost walking Rex?" her mom called before walking out the door, knowing her daughter's habits with her imaginary dog.

Sophie broke into a run as she caught sight of her parents coming out to meet her, Rex bounding along behind her. However, Sophie's glee turned into a look of innocent confusion when her parents suddenly froze in place, her daddy turning pale as a ghost and her mommy suddenly letting out a terrified scream. Both of their gazes were aimed over Sophie's head at the black beast in a dog's collar standing behind the six-year-old, wagging its tail in excitement and nearly taking out the mailbox.

"S-soph-sophie...wh-what is th-th-that?" Sophie's dad sputtered in a high-pitched squeak. Sophie laughed at her daddy's funny voice.

"It's Rex! Say hello, Rex!" she said eagerly. Rex let out a very friendly roar, spitting out a tongue of flame into the air.

"Dr-Dr-Dr-" Sophie's mom stuttered before fainting dead away, only just barely being caught by her husband.

"Dog!" Sophie cheered, "He's the most perfect dog ever! And he's all mine!" There was a thud as Sophie's dad followed suit after his wife, falling to the ground in a dead faint. Mommy and Daddy must be really tired, Sophie thought before skipping off to the backyard to play fetch with her new pet.





## All Cockeyed & Narrow

*James Embree*

The lapping waves gently patted a thin layer of blackish sand on the shores of Casablanca Lake. Or so, this is what Jesslyn noticed as she cast her gaze from her feet to her face down into the water. She looked into her own eyes made black by the water, and scoffed as she settled down into the bench behind her. She leaned back in it, as if to be there awhile. The clouds blotted out the sky, the air was frigid, and the wind? piercing. Jesslyn had hoped that today would be a good one to walk in this here park, but she also noticed ten fingers on her hands with no ring, and recalled being totally psyched to have a bun in the oven by this time, so she could only assume that her life was just a domino effect of disappointments and anticlimaxes. On top of it all, a passerby goose squawked directly at her. Jesslyn gave it the finger and craved a cigarette she didn't have.

She heard a car door slam up the path a ways and turned around to see a man with square shoulders, green flannel, and a damn-near demonic-looking cluster of facial hair. All this aside, it was the Anton Chigurh-stalk he made over to the bench and the dead-eyed stare that gave him away as her now ex-fiancé. It seemed as though no amount of military training could suck out the dispassion and relentless fatigue from the man. Jesslyn sighed a grieving sigh and raised her hand as if waiting for a teacher to call on it.

"Floyd. Hey Floyd! I'm over here."

The head lowered as the rest of the body walked

lazily to the bench where Jesslyn sat. She saw only the hair on his head and the smoky breath insulated by the February atmosphere. Still, even with disdain for the man pumping the blood in her veins, a small part of Jesslyn's heart came to a close when he was in her proximity. The spaces between the seconds dragged on for a bit.

Then those four magic letters struck an ugly and disgruntled chord in her: A-W-O-L.

He sat down, looking quite weathered for 11 AM. There was a silence.

"Jesslyn..." He muttered. "Let me just start this off by saying how sorry I am..."

Her eyes met blackness as she rolled them back inside her cranium full-force, fully armed for a war on the pitiable. She scoffed again and shot back: "It's not me you should be apologizing to, Floyd."

Floyd, Floyd, Floyd. She always had liked that name. Like Pink Floyd, that trippy shit her loser uncle likes. She thought back to her stance by the bonfire that night two-and-a-half years prior, where he had introduced himself with the gump-tion she'd been searching for in another.

"Floyd?"

"Yeah like in 2001."

"Jesslyn. Like in absolutely nothing." They laughed as the fire reflected on the freshly-polished hoods of the partygoers trucks.

Now they were twenty-two, sitting here, apparent-

ly nowhere to go but down. He looked at her and their eyes met. It was like starting a car with a busted belt. Somewhere that goose squawked again.

"They kept telling me what to do, Jess..."

"That's what the military does, Floyd!"

"Not like this..." He sat there in a trance, like he'd just gotten a death sentence. "The things we had to do in Iraq were inhuman. Wouldn't ask nobody to do 'em..."

He kept his fix on Casablanca Lake. Jesslyn figured he may as well be talking to it. She usually felt Christ with her but found he was on a smoking break right now. She got down to brass tacks and reached in her coat pocket. She dug around and wrapped her fingers around the modest diamond and picked out the ring. His hands were as dead as his eyes, so she grabbed his hand and slapped the ring on in.

There was a complex soiree of emotions swimming the confines of Jesslyn at this moment, but none of them were that of understanding. They'd had it all—Good looks both ways, a ton of familial money, they were Aryan (not that that mattered), and they both found employment: her at daddy's business and him under Uncle Sam. But the brakes were slammed upon when she got the call. She remembered it—distanced, monotonous, with a mutual grip on disbelief.

"You don't need to explain anything to me," she said, dragging an imaginary cigarette. She smirked almost. "You're just a coward. That's it."

It was somewhere in-between "coward" and "it" that an invisible jolt must've struck Floyd Bannerman, because it was then that he got up and kicked the gravel before the sand and started a rousing game of "Who-Can-Yell-Louder?" with his former fiancé. They were both winning. There was an influx of words and insults colder than the air around them, and the frigidity was only reclaimed by the air when she yelled: "Why'd you even join the army if you can't handle this shit?!"

With that question and the slumping of Floyd's backside back into the bench, the quiet seized the day once more. As it did its victory lap, Floyd looked up at his (former) woman and asked her: "You remember why I'd said I wanted to join the army?"

Recollections beamed down into Jesslyn as genuine pity and self-disgust filled and overflowed her with stutters and incoherent utterances. She remembered the whole conversation, but just filed it under the "Boring" section of the "Pillow Talk" drawer in her psyche. It was the men in the family. All the male Bannermans joined the army for a few years before going out into the world. His grandpa stormed Normandy and Father got lucky and avoided combat. She stood there in a mesmerized sulk at her misremembrance.

"It's okay," he said. "You're mad, I get it." She looked down on him the way a mother would child, hardly the hulking figure she'd fallen for.

"Wait..." she said. "What about your older brother? Why didn't he serve?"

"Well..." Floyd took in a gust of the air before

going on, "It's not that all the men serve, so-to-say, it's more that the idea hangs over them from birth. The pressures of the son surpassing the father are old as time, Jesslyn, especially to the Bannermans. There was an air of contempt in my house, even as a child, those quiet eyes peering from above a newspaper, they gave me nightmaric visions in my sleep, I recall tossing and turning well into my teens.

"My brother was actually going to serve at first, at least I think. My father actually acted warmly to him on occasion. I was jealous. They talked sports and went boating and fishing, while I sat at home. His preference for him was always a result of his seeming masculinity and militant instincts. He was dad's little soldier, pretty much.

"But it was on one day, cool as the one we're sitting in, that it changed for us. See they took me hunting, I was eight and he ten. It was the first time they'd ever let me come, with jokes at my expense on the way, of course. We were hunting quail. I deemed it my task to impress the man that day, but I was horribly bored with the experience. It was all walk, no chase — It consisted mostly of trekking behind my father for hours on end, sipping water. It was getting dark when we finally saw one strutting through our line of sight. It was in my area and Father leaned over my shoulder and muttered his kindest words of the day: 'Go on boy. Shoot it.'

"I'd like to tell you that that is where this ends, but I'm afraid the firing of the gun was the easy part. The gun's barrel leapt into my face, again to my expense. When they were done laughing, we navigated to the quail to collect the body, ready to stuff it and put 'im on in the corner when we got

home. But as Father got closer, he hissed at me, 'It's twitching.' And he was right. It still had a little kick in him.

"And 'Here boy,' he said, handing me a rock. 'Finish it.' I stood there lamely, rock in my left hand, while my brother said something, I can't quite remember. But what I do remember was being lost in that face. It just stared at me, all cockeyed and narrow. I shut my eyes as I did it, causing me to hurt my fingers severely. All finished I looked at my hand and the rock, hardly differentiating the bird's blood from my own.

"...It'd occur to my father later that we could've just snapped the neck of the bird. 'Guess there was no need to bloody our hands' he said. He didn't have to tell me that, but he did.

"Anyway, after I was done, it'd seemed the shutting of my eyes caused some tears to leak out. It was upon noticing this that my brother started laughing and calling me things like 'girl' and 'cry-baby,' so I got real mad... and I darted over to him, and beat the boy senseless with my good hand. My face was blood red and my hands were numb. I can still hear my father pointing and laughing at the scenario, not just a standard guffaw or a contemptuous snigger, but a parade of hysterics that likely scared all the quail in the state off.

"I cried myself to sleep that night. The next morning, Father came from behind me and put his hand on my shoulder while I ate cereal. I was the new 'soldier,' 'the man' so-to-speak. My brother took up a quiet ambiance about him, while my father started inviting me to sports and boat trips. My brother walked with a new distaste for my family, but I'd



also notice a small aura of relief in his voice. I never would again, but as the impressionable young man I was, I'd've willingly bashed in as many quails as possible for the warmth of my father's hand on my shoulder."

He looked up. Jesslyn's face was scrunched into a peculiarity that he couldn't explain, but if he had too, he'd likely use the words "confusion," "doubtful," and most of all "loathing." But he'd put himself on this cross, time to hammer in the nails.

"And that's why my brother didn't serve, Jess."

He sat and listened to the ticking of an invisible clock, waiting on her response.

## The Salamander

*Evie Lubak*

Kali's family owned a vacation house in rural Florida. Every year, Kali, her two younger brothers, and her parents would leave the cold of northern Ohio to spend the entire summer in Florida. It was Kali's favorite time of the year as, unlike most teenagers, Kali loved to be outdoors. She loved to look for hidden paths through the trees or observe the local wildlife. Her mother teased that Kali had more "friends" in their backyard than she did back home at school.

Perhaps it was due to Kali's love of nature that she found the salamander. Kali was on her way home after a walk through the woods. Normally, Kali's head would be up to keep an eye out for birds or a low hanging branch. Today, however, her eyes were cast downward as she kicked a stone as she walked. As she pulled back her foot to send the rock skittering across the dirt, she glimpsed a flicker of bright orange out of the corner of her eye. Shifting her focus from her one-man game of soccer to the splash of color, Kali spotted a creature no bigger than her index finger lounging on a mossy rock. It was a pitch-black salamander with a bright tangerine underbelly and flecks on its back. As Kali leaned in closer to study it, the salamander lifted its head up and stared at her with bulging yellow eyes with slit pupils. There were two thin membranes running along its back like webbing, an oddity she had never seen before. A forked pink tongue flickered in and out of its mouth as it watched her. She was surprised the little creature had not tried to run away yet.

Kali grinned as she came up with the wonderful idea to take the salamander home with her. Her brothers would be thrilled. Carefully, she scooped up the salamander and cupped it in her hands. She felt the once lethargic lizard struggle, its tiny feet tickling her skin. Its body was slick, with a slimy film, yet pleasantly warm.

"Hey, calm down, little guy. I'm not going to eat you," she whispered to it soothingly.

Surprisingly, the salamander settled down at once. She peeked through her fingers to see those yellow eyes staring right back at her.

"Weird... I guess you're a smart one, huh? So, what should I call you?" she asked.

The salamander flicked its tongue.

"Flint? Yeah, you look like a Flint," she smiled, "I can't wait to introduce you to my family!"

Kali ran the rest of the way home, trying not to jostle Flint too much. As she expected, her brothers, both six, squealed with delight at the sight of the salamander, asking non-stop to hold him but Kali refused for fear of them crushing the tiny creature. The boys insisted Flint was their pet now, an idea Kali could easily get behind. Seeing no harm in such a small house guest, Kali's parents agreed. Kali was put in charge of caring for Flint.

At first, Kali kept Flint in a shoe box. She dug up worms to feed him every day and kept the box in the sun so he never got too cold. She often let him sit on her shoulder when she walked around the house. Sometimes, she would let him lay on

her bed while she talked to him. Even though she knew he probably didn't understand a single word as he stared at her with those yellow eyes, she appreciated having such an attentive listener.

In a week, Flint had doubled in size, now as big as her hand, so she had to get him a bigger box. Flint's growth spurts did not stop there, however. In another week, the salamander had grown another four inches, and before the following week ended, he was over a foot long. Kali had to dig the old fish aquarium out of the garage to keep their rapidly-growing pet in. Flint was changing in other ways, too. His skin lost its usual slime, drying out and toughening. He wasn't as fat and squat anymore, his body stretching out bit by bit. The weird membranes on his back were growing longer with little bones in them like fins. Kali worried for his health at first, but Flint seemed just as content and lazy as ever. Even if he was getting big, she still loved to hold him or let him sit on her shoulder. His body was always so warm.

Flint's growth did not sit well with Kali's parents, though. They had allowed him to stay initially because he was small. There was no denying now that Flint was eating everything, and needing more and more room. Her parents put up with this for a while, not wanting to upset their kids by taking their precious pet, but when Flint had doubled in size to that of a large cat, they put their foot down. It was time for the salamander to return to the wild.

This decision, of course, was met with tears from the boys who were adamant not to give up their "baby dragon" and Kali argued that she could find somewhere else to keep Flint. However, her

parents were firm and pointed out that Flint was too big to take back to Ohio when the summer was over. The following morning, after her brothers had given him hugs, Kali was forced to return Flint to the woods.

"Guess this is where we say goodbye, big guy," she mumbled once she had gone far enough. She glanced down at Flint who was sitting patiently by her feet, staring at her with those big yellow eyes. His tongue flicked in and out. She smiled before kneeling down to give him a hug herself.

"I'm going to miss you, but I won't forget you," she said, pulling back to look him in the eye, "I promise I'll look for you next summer, okay? Who knows how big you'll be by then..."

Flint just stared back, flicking his tongue. Kali wondered if he had any clue what was going on. He then leaned his head forward and blew a hot breath in her face, tickling her nose with his tongue. His own form of goodbye.

Leaving a few hotdogs on the ground for him, Kali ran in the opposite direction from the salamander, not looking back.

By next summer, Kali's brothers had forgotten about their special pet and her parents never brought it up again. Kali, however, had a promise to keep.

On a warm night, she snuck outside while her family slept with a bowl of leftover hamburger meat. She went to the edge of the woods and waited, eyes sharp for anything lured in by the food. Just as she was drifting off, a blast of hot air washed

over her. She slowly looked up to see something towering over her. She scrambled backwards to get away from the beast, but it followed her. No longer hidden by the trees, Kali could see that the creature was a very large reptile, pitch-black and almost invisible in the dark were it not for its tangerine underbelly and jagged markings across its body that almost glowed like embers. Two full, bat-like wings sprouted from its back. Kali's breath quickened as the oversized lizard leaned its head in closer to her face, but her fear faded as an intelligent yellow gaze met her own.

"Flint?" she whispered in shock. She could have sworn the salamander, no, the dragon smiled at her before flicking its forked tongue out to tickle her nose. She couldn't help but giggle.

"Who would have thought my brothers were right all this time? You really were a baby dragon! You're huge!" she exclaimed.

Flint rested his head on her shoulder, nearly knocking Kali over, and gave a content growl.

"I glad to see you too. Now, we have all summer to be together...though I don't think my parents would let you in the house anymore," she said in a serious tone, though it didn't stifle the joy in her eyes. Flint gave another rumble that almost sounded like a throaty chuckle and Kali couldn't help but join him, so happy to be reunited with her pet.





Sunset at Peace  
*Kassie Burton*

Printed by Barefoot Press in Raleigh, NC  
on 100 lb. cover with 100 lb. text  
using Book Antiqua typeface in regular and italic





The image features a dark, textured background. In the corners, there are stylized, geometric shapes in various colors: yellow and purple in the top-left, blue and red in the top-right, and green, yellow, and orange in the bottom-left. The year '2018' is centered in a large, blue, 3D-style font with a white outline and a slight shadow.

2018